

**DECISION NOTICE:**  
**Harper's Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) Development**  
**Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**  
**Region 2 Office**  
**3201 Spurgin Road**  
**Missoula, MT 59804**  
**(406) 542-5500**

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes development of the Harper's Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) along the Clark Fork River in Missoula County near Missoula, MT to improve public access to this stretch of river. Proposed development includes site signage, boundary fencing and barrier rock, an access road into the property, a designated parking area for 24-36 vehicles, a concrete vault latrine and a concrete boat launch with a cable mat. A 50-foot riparian buffer would be protected and enhanced to reduce impacts to water quality from developments at the site. Development would be phased in as budget allows.

**Alternative A: No Action**

If FWP were not to develop the Harper's Bridge FAS, continued use of the unimproved public access would likely continue. Without a designated parking area with improved access for trailered boats, parking would continue on the county road, creating increased traffic hazards and congestion along the road as well as haphazard pioneered parking degrading adjacent vegetation. Without a latrine, health and safety issues would likely continue and become worse as visitors increase in number without proper sanitation facilities. Under this alternative, the Deep Creek FAS would continue to be used as the primary river access point for this reach. Vehicle access to the Deep Creek area is difficult and inconvenient for motorists as it lies on the west bank of the river, opposite from an existing paved road network. If FWP were not to develop the Harper's Bridge FAS, management of the site would remain at a minimal level with weed maintenance and periodic site visits by FWP regional staff.

**Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action**

FWP proposes to develop the Harper's Bridge FAS. Development would include boundary fencing and barrier rock, site signage, designated parking area for 24-36 vehicles, a concrete vault latrine, a concrete boat launch with cable mat, and revegetation of a 50-foot riparian buffer. The development would be phased in as funding allows, with primary construction during Fall 2010 and completed during Fall 2011. The proposed development would enhance visitor use of this site, provide a safer, more organized and sanitary site as well as provide long-term protection and revegetation of the riverbank.

**PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT**

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment from June 18, 2010 through July 19, 2010. Legal notices were published once each in the *Missoulian*, and the *Helena Independent Record* newspapers. FWP distributed 22 copies of the EA, and 20 postcard and 6 email-notifications of the EA's availability to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>), under "Recent Public Notices" beginning June 18. A statewide news release was also sent out.

During the public review and comment period for the EA, four comments requested that FWP hold a public meeting to have further discussion regarding the proposal. In response to these requests, on October 5, 2010 FWP held a public meeting at the Missoula Doubletree Hotel. FWP notified a large number of individuals,

organizations, private businesses, and outfitters of the meeting date (16 by e-mail and 100 by postcard). A news release was also sent out on September 22 announcing the October 5 meeting. The attendance at the meeting consisted of 24 individuals of the public and six FWP employees. The proposal was presented, open dialogue was held between the public and staff and then verbal comments were recorded from the public. Individuals were also allowed to comment in writing until October 13, 2010.

FWP received 34 comments (17 during the EA comment period and 17 from the public meeting), with 7 in support of the proposed project, 10 not in support of the proposed project, 13 that did not indicate outright support or opposition to the proposal due to concerns regarding potential motorized use associated with development of the site, and four that were neutral. The following is a summary of comments received and response from FWP where applicable.

**1. Some of the comments received offered general support for the proposed project. The following are representative:**

- “Harper’s Bridge FAS is a much needed facility in the right location for users of one of Montana’s most significant water resources. The design is well placed on the site, and the environmental effects are few.”
- “I think this is a WONDERFUL idea and hope it comes to fruition.”
- “As a resident of the Harper’s Bridge area, I’m glad to see the improvements being proposed.”

**2. Some of the comments received were not in support of the proposed project. The following are representative:**

- “I think the site at Harper’s is fine the way it is.”
- “To spend thousands improving the site when there is one literally across the river seems ridiculous, especially when the put-in at Fort Missoula, Single Tree, First Creek and Dry Creek on the Clark Fork are unimproved.”
- “Until we’ve dealt with the issues on the south side and until we’ve talked about all these potential connected impacts from developing the north side, we cannot support this particular proposal.”

**3. Some of the comments did not indicate outright support or opposition to the proposal due to concerns regarding potential motorized use associated with development of the site. The following are representative:**

- “We think that the fishing access site itself is probably okay, if it is done right, and it’s really going to mean managing motorized access.”
- “While I am in favor of upgrading Fishing Access Sites, I am concerned about the increase of motorized water craft and the potential hazards posed.”
- “We are not in opposition to some development of the site for fishing access if mitigation measures include meaningful effective restrictions on motorized boat and jet ski use.”
- “It seems to me that there is so much concern about possible increase in motorboat use that that is something that you need to know before you go ahead.”

*FWP Response: Of the 34 total comments FWP received during the public process, 21 of them included concerns regarding motorized river use. As a result, FWP will be evaluating these concerns and exploring potential solutions in a process (with opportunity for public involvement) that is separate from this decision. This effort will begin in Spring 2011.*

## DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), along with the public comments and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, it is my decision to proceed with a modified plan of the proposed action (See the modified site plan in Appendix A). Throughout the public process, a considerable number of comments expressed concern regarding potential increase of user conflicts as well as safety issues if another fully developed boat launch – which could accommodate launching of motorized watercraft – is developed on this stretch of the Clark Fork River. These concerns, tied to those comments in support of development at Harper’s Bridge, led to the decision for a modified plan incorporating a scaled-back site design.

Modifications to the original proposal include development of a carry-in hand launch area instead of a concrete boat ramp and a reduction in parking capacity from 24-36 vehicles to 17 vehicles (12 vehicle/trailer, 4 vehicle-only, and 1 for disabled parking that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act).

The implementation of a modified site design that includes a concrete vault latrine, site signage, a hardened gravel road and parking area, boundary fencing, barrier rocks and revegetation of a 50-foot riparian buffer will enable FWP to provide for public access at Harper’s Bridge Fishing Access Site while minimizing negative resource impacts associated with recreational use. Additionally, establishment of a carry-in hand launch instead of a concrete boat launch will mitigate concerns related to motorized access to the Clark Fork at Harper’s Bridge. As noted earlier in the EA, FWP will be examining concerns related to motorized river use in Spring 2011. In the future, if motorized concerns change or are diminished, FWP could re-consider development of a concrete boat ramp.

I have determined that the decision to proceed with the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA. The draft EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address on page 1. The EA is still available for review on FWP’s web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>) under “Recent Public Notices” (enter “Harper’s” in Search Public Notices).

In accordance with MFWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701.



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**Lee Bastian**  
**Region 2 Parks Manager**

**3-31-11**

**Date**

# APPENDIX A – MODIFIED SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

